

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NODS-00

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O 120952Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4114
AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY
USMISSION USUN PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 8752

EXDIS--DIST AS NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PINS, LE, IS
SUBJECT: LEBANESE CRISIS - DISCUSSION WITH BEGIN

REF: STATE 174090

1. I MET ALONE WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN AT MY REQUEST
FOR APPROXIMATELY THIRTY MINUTES LATE MORNING OF JULY 11.
TOLD HIM THAT I WANTED TO EXCHANGE VIEWS INFORMALLY AND
VERY FRANKLY WITH HIM ABOUT THE LEBANESE CRISIS WHICH I
HAD BEEN DISCUSSING FREQUENTLY WITH WEIZMAN DURING RECENT
DAYS. SAID I WAS REASSURED BY WEIZMAN'S STATEMENTS TO
ME ABOUT ISRAELI EFFORTS TO DISABUSE CHRISTIAN MILITIA
LEADERS OF BELIEF THAT THEY COULD COUNT ON ISRAELI

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MILITARY INTERVENTION TO PULL THEIR CHESTNUTS OUT OF THE
FIRE. NONETHELESS, I HAD TO REPORT TO HIM THAT WE CONTINUED
TO GET INTELLIGENCE FROM BEIRUT THAT PHALANGISTS
IN PARTICULAR SEEMED DETERMINEDLY PREPARING TO GO AFTER
THE SYRIANS AND CONVINCED THAT ISRAEL WOULD STEP IN TO
HELP THEM IF NECESSARY.

2. THEN WENT OVER FOR BEGIN THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS IN OUR THINKING ABOUT NEXT STEPS, SUMMARIZED IN REFTEL, STRESSING THE NEED TO KEEP THE UNEASY CEASEFIRE IN BEING WHILE ENCOURAGING THE VARIOUS LEBANESE LEADERS AND THE SYRIANS TO WORK OUT SOME FORM OF DISENGAGEMENT TO LOWER THE RISK OF RENEWED MILITARY CONFRONTATION. I STRESSED THAT THE SYRIANS WERE RESTRAINING THEMSELVES FROM RESPONDING TO SNIPER FIRE OR OTHER LIMITED CHRISTIAN MILITIA PROVOCATIONS. HOWEVER, THEY HAD LEFT US IN NO DOUBT THAT IF MASSIVELY PROVOKED AGAIN THEY WOULD RESPOND EVEN MORE MASSIVELY, AT THE INEVITABLE COST OF GREAT BLOODSHED AND DESTRUCTION IN BEIRUT. I PAINTED A GRAPHIC PICTURE OF HOW MISINTERPRETATION OF ISRAELI INTENTIONS COULD LEAD TO CHRISTIAN MISCALCULATION AND ULTIMATELY TO THE OUTBREAK OF MAJOR WAR BETWEEN SYRIA AND ISRAEL, UNDERSCORING WHAT I HAD BEEN SAYING TO WEIZMAN DAILY ABOUT THE NEED TO GET ACROSS UNEQUIVOCAL MESSAGE TO THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS THAT THEY WILL NOT HAVE ISRAELI MILITARY SUPPORT IF THEY PROVOKE A MASSIVE SYRIAN RESPONSE BY THEIR ACTIONS.

3. BEGIN LISTENED INTENTLY TO MY LENGTHY PRESENTATION OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CRISIS. HE THEN CONFIRMED THAT THE GOI HAD BEEN AND WAS CONTINUALLY COUNSELING MODERATION AND RESTRAINT TO THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS WITH WHOM THEY WERE IN CONTACT. HE SAID HE FULLY ENDORSED THE STATEMENTS WEIZMAN HAD MADE TO ME ABOUT ISRAEL'S
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DETERMINATION TO AVOID BEING DRAWN INTO MILITARY ACTION. HE SAID THAT WEIZMAN'S ASSURANCES WERE FULLY SUPPORTED BY THE CABINET. HE ACKNOWLEDGED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE COULD BE A REAL DANGER OF "SLIDING DOWN A SLIPPERY SLOPE INTO WAR" IF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS MISCALCULATED AND DREW UPON THEMSELVES THE FULL WEIGHT OF THE SYRIAN IRE, SINCE POLITICAL PRESSURES AND MORAL COMMITMENTS WERE GREAT IN ISRAEL "NOT TO PERMIT THE CHRISTIANS TO BE SLAUGHTERED." HE SEEMED TO TAKE VERY SERIOUSLY MY STRICTURES ABOUT THE NEED TO DISABUSE THE GEMAYELS AND OTHER CHRISTIAN LEADERS OF THE BELIEF THAT THEY HAVE FULL ISRAELI BACKING; AT SAME TIME, HE SAID IT HAD BEEN IMPORTANT TO KEEP THEIR MORALE FROM COLLAPSING, AND

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 8752

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

THAT THIS HAD BEEN THE PURPOSE OF THE AIRCRAFT OVER-
FLIGHTS A FEW DAYS AGO. I SAID IT WAS ALL VERY GOOD TO
KEEP THE CHRISTIANS' MORALE UP, BUT ACTIONS LIKE OVER-
FLIGHTS RAN THE GRAVE RISK OF IMPLYING A READINESS TO DO
MORE THAN JUST OVERFLY, THEREBY ENCOURAGING THE VERY
THING WE WERE ALL ANXIOUS TO AVOID--OUTBREAK OF MASSIVE
VIOLENCE AGAIN TRIGGERED BY CHRISTIAN AGGRESSIVENESS.
HE RUEFULLY ADMITTED THAT THIS WAS INDEED A REAL DILEMMA.

4. BEGIN COMMENTED AT ONE POINT ON THE FACT THAT ALL
ISRAELI CONTACTS ARE WITH LEADERS OF THE CHRISTIAN
MILITIA GROUPS, NONE WITH THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. HE
SAID HE THOUGHT IT WOULD CLEARLY HELP TO AVOID MISCAL-
CULATION IF THE GOI COULD BE IN TOUCH WITH MEMBERS OF
THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT, NOT JUST THE "UNOFFICIAL"
CHRISTIAN LEADERS.

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5. WE CONCLUDED THE CONVERSATION WITH MUTUAL ASSURANCES
OF VERY CLOSE CONSULTATION IN THE DAYS AHEAD. I AGAIN
ASKED HIM TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO URGE RESTRAINT
ON THE CHRISTIANS, AND ASSURED HIM WE WERE DOING EVERY-
THING DIPLOMATICALLY WITHIN OUR POWER IN ALL INFLUENTIAL
CAPITALS, INCLUDING SPECIFICALLY JIDDA, TO URGE RESTRAINT
AND A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION ON BOTH THE SYRIANS AND THE

LEBANESE.

6. BEGIN'S FINAL WORDS TO ME WERE "THEN LETS AGREE THAT THERE ARE TWO OVERRIDING PRINCIPLES WHICH MUST BE MAINTAINED: NO MASSACRE OF CHRISTIANS IN LEBANON, AND NO WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND SYRIA." I RESPONDED THAT WE COULD THOROUGHLY ENDORSE BOTH PRINCIPLES, AND WOULD CERTAINLY DO OUR BEST TO SEE THAT THEY WERE OBSERVED. LEWIS

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